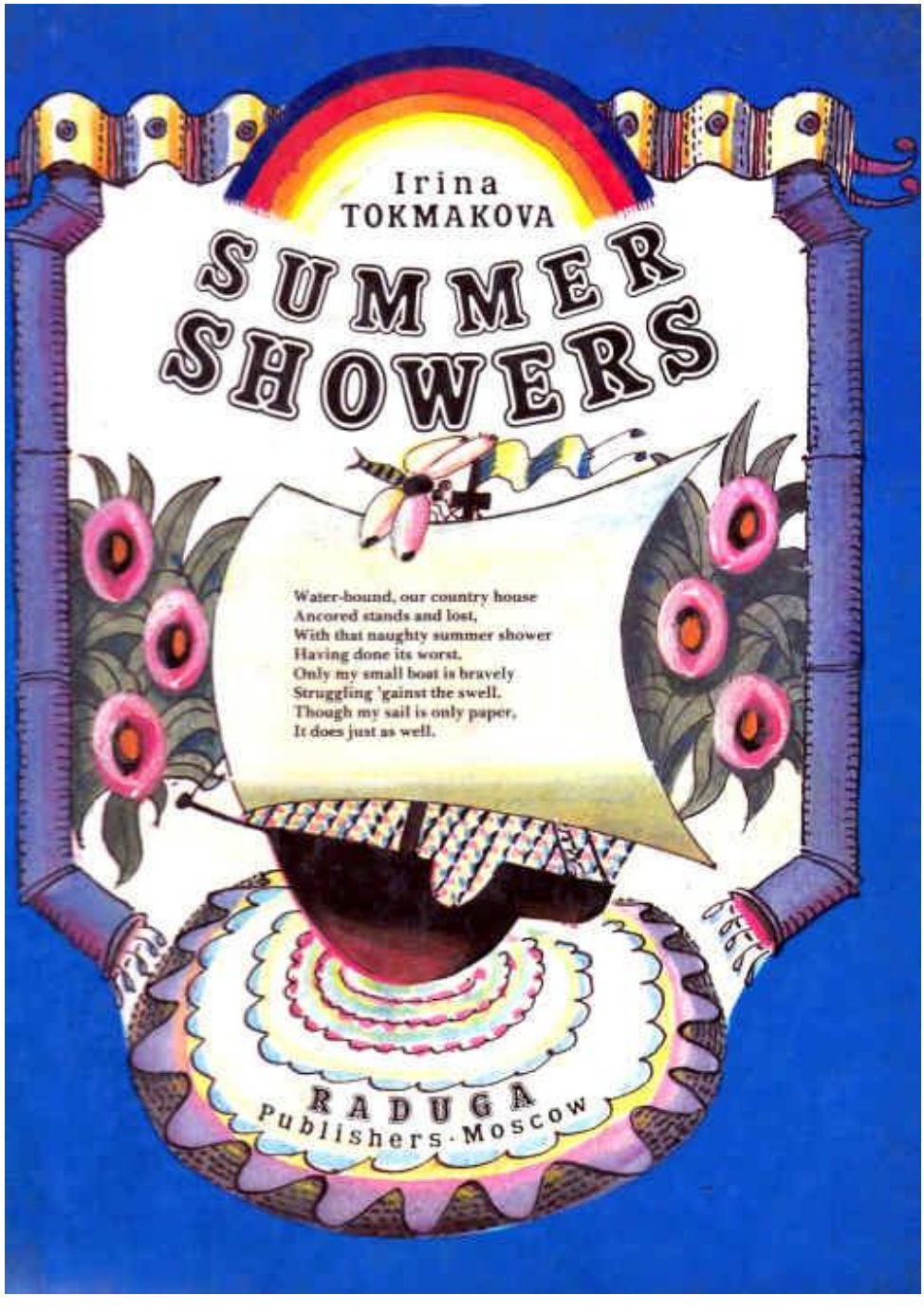
Irina
TOKMAKOVA
SUMMER
SHOWERS
Water-bound, our country house
Ancored stands and lost,
With that naughty summer shower
Having done its worst.
Only my small boat is bravely
Struggling 'gainst the swell.
Though my sail is only paper,
It does just as well.
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Tokmakova

SUMMER SHOWERS

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Moscow

Irina Tokmakova

SUMMER SHOWERS

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ДЕТСКИЙ ЗВОНОК
На английском языке

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TREES
poems

TREES

APPLE TREE

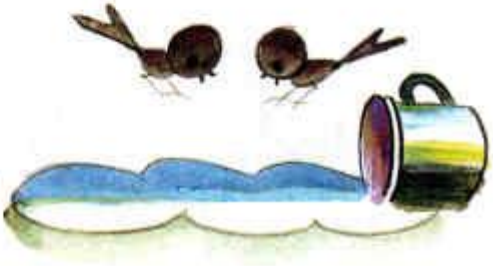
In my little garden
There's an apple tree,
Covered with white blossoms,
Pretty as can be!

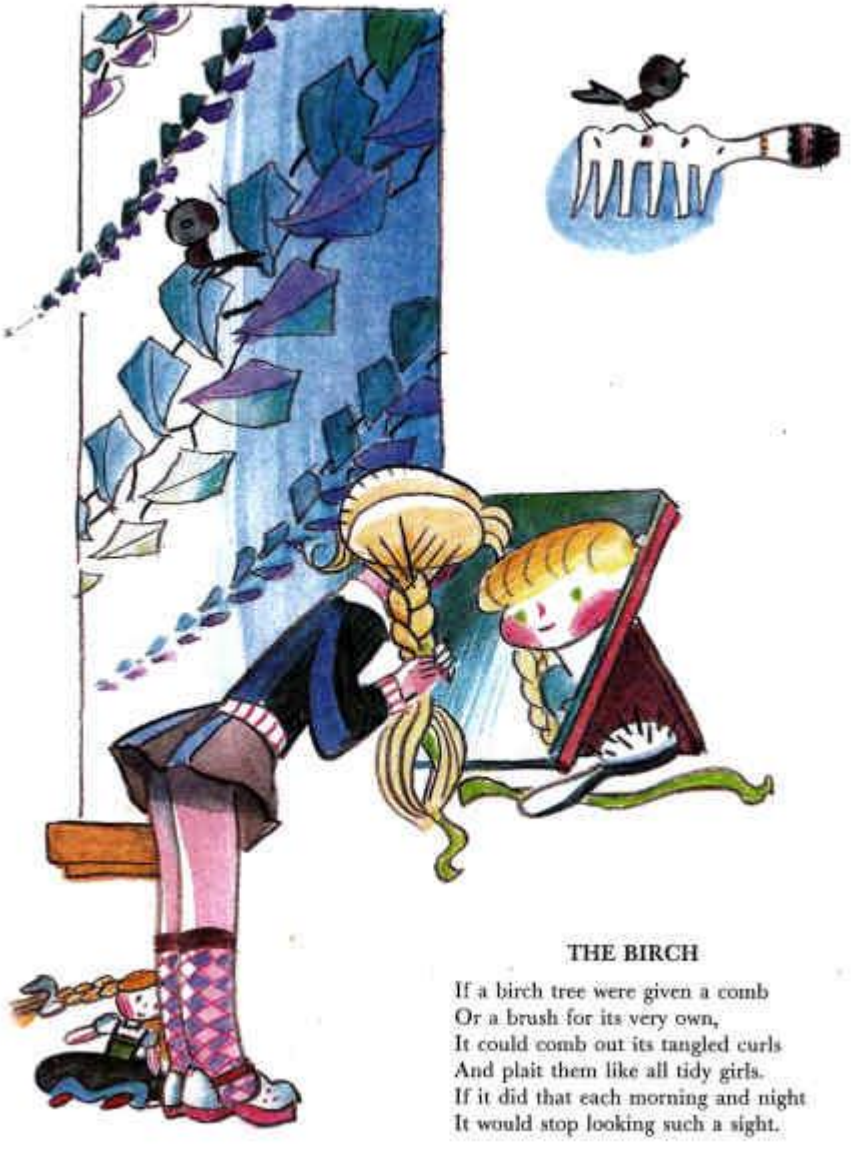
I've a dress I'll put on,
Apple-green with white,
Everyone will say then
That we look alike.

THE WEEPING WILLOW

By the water's edge a willow
Weeps and droops so very sadly.
Has some naughty little fellow
Pulled its pigtail, hurting badly?

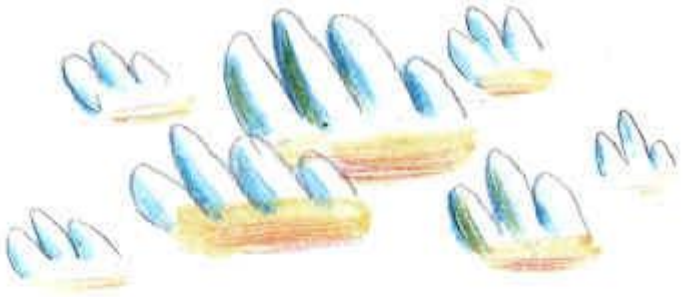
Is it weeping for a friend?
Is it thirsty and can't bend
Low enough to reach the water?
Shall we ask it what's the matter?





THE BIRCH

If a birch tree were given a comb
Or a brush for its very own,
It could comb out its tangled curls
And plait them like all tidy girls.
If it did that each morning and night
It would stop looking such a sight.



PINES

Pines try to grow so tall that they'll sweep
The sky with their crowns every day,
So the whole year round bright and clear it will keep.
With no ugly clouds come to stay.

ASPENS

Ah, the poor little trees,
Always chilled to the bone,
Trembling so in the breeze,
When it's ever so warm!

Won't someone please give them
Some warm things to wear,
At least they won't shiver
In weather this fair.

FIRS

Firs on the edge of the forest,
Their heads almost touching the clouds,
Are watching their grandchildren fondly,
They listen, but don't speak aloud.

The grandchildren, short little saplings,
With needles still silky and fine,
Are doing a round dance, babbling
And having a wonderful time.

OAKS

Oaks aren't bothered by the weather,
If it rains or blows;
Have you seen an oak tree ever
With a running nose?
They stay green till late in autumn
In a yellowed wood,
That's because they have been toughened
From their babyhood.

THE ROWAN

A bright red berry, sweet to see,
The rowan tree once gave to me,
But it was bitter like a pill,
The worst you're given when you're ill.

Perhaps that berry was too green,
Or could the rowan be so mean
To give it me just for the fun
Of watching me grimace and squirm?

CONVERSATIONS

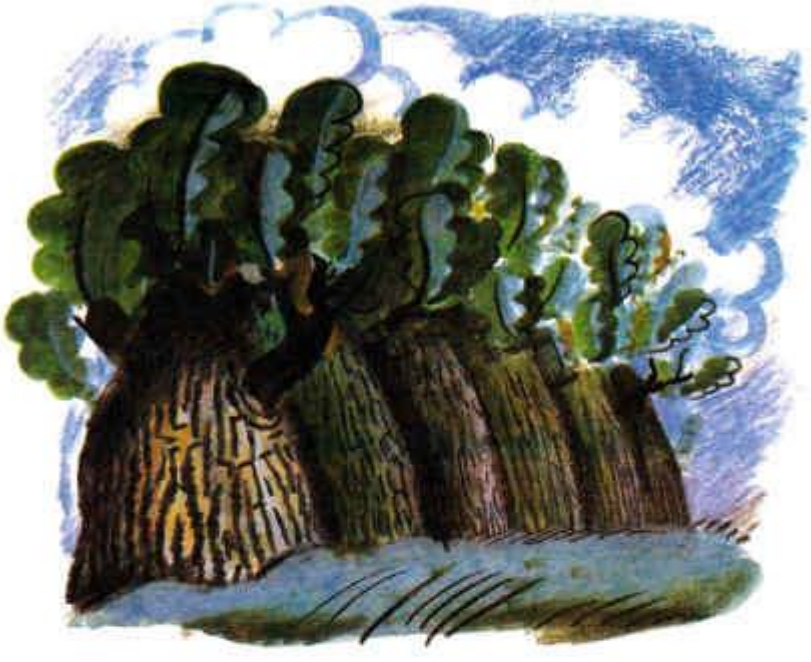
* * *

In a circle moves the sun.
A Mother Elk's asleep
In the forest with her young.
Let's not pry or peep.
Here's a path, we'll walk about
Where the trees are thinning.
See that magpie on the bough
Glossy feathers trimming?
There, upon a roadside stone
Sunk into the ground,
Sleeps a lizard all alone.
Let it, make no sound!
Listen, do you hear that chirping,
Guess what it can be?
It's our tape-recorder working,
Noting everything;
What the frogs are squabbling over,
What the hare was told
By that nosey young mosquito,
Every small thing, word for word.

And when home we come at dusk
All these conversations
We shall have played back for us
In, of course, translation.

Quiet, children, here we go,
I have pressed the button.
That's a path, it wants to know
Where's the nearest crossing.

Here's the wind, it's whispering
To the little aspens.
Must be something interesting.
Let's just sit and listen.



A SONG OF YOUNG OAKS

You're a shoot,
And I'm a shoot,
One—a leaf,
And two—a leaf.
We shall grow a little more,
We'll be sturdier than before,
You're an oak,
And I'm an oak,
You're a tree,
And I'm a tree.
Standing side by side we'll be
Called a grove, you wait and see!

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A PATH AND A STREAM

"Tell me, is the crossing near?"
"Right here."

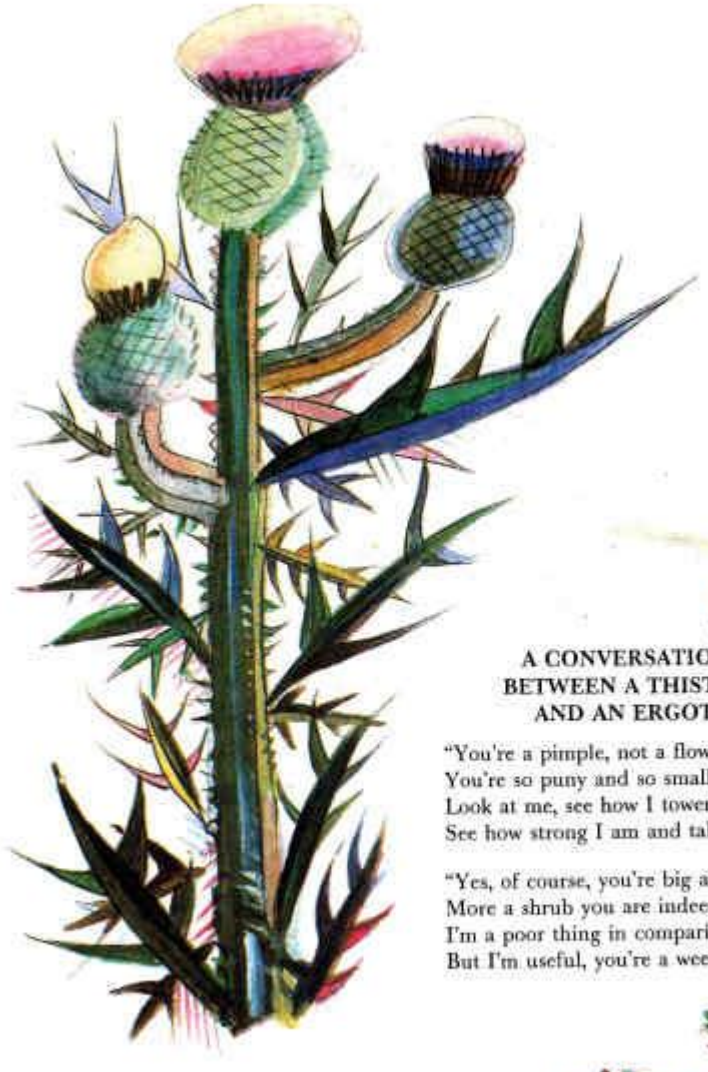
A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE WIND AND THE ASPENS

"Good-morning, Wind, how do you do?
Why all this haste and flurry
Before the cock-a-doodle-do?
Let's chat a bit, don't hurry."
"I'm sorry, Aspens, I've no time,
I'm off to town, you see.
I've messages from friends of mine
For different addressees.
I must deliver them today
To lanes and streets and squares,
To tunnels and to passageways,
To houses here and there.
They're greetings from the forest world,
From flowering shrubs and trees,
From babbling brooks and singing birds,
And all the busy bees.
So spring would also come to town
And scent the air with forest smells,
So nobody would wear a frown,
All would be smiles, all would be well."

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A FLY AND A BIG FIR TREE

"Who're you nodding to, Big Fir Tree?
Or are you sewing on the quiet,
Stitching clouds together firmly
So the sun can never come out?"

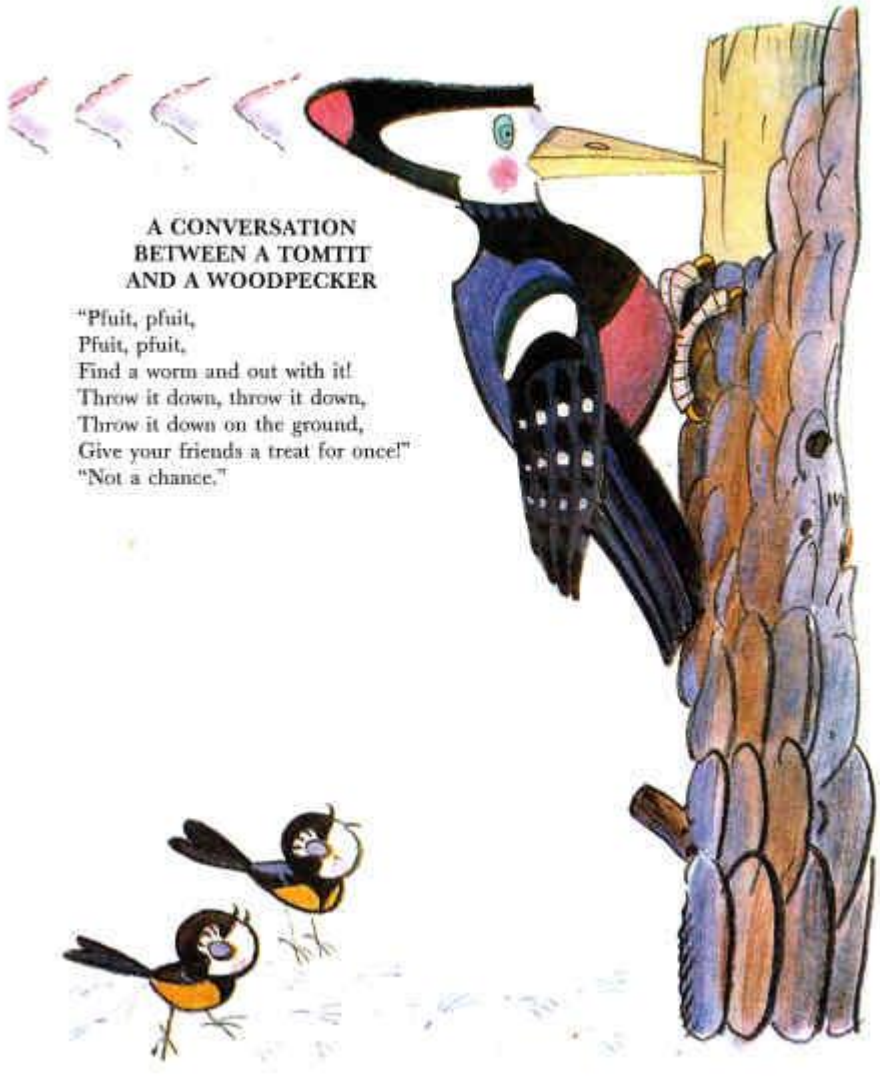
"Silly little Fly, you shock me
With the nonsense you suggest.
It's the wind to sleep I'm rocking,
Lately it's been such a pest."



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A THISTLE AND AN ERGOT

"You're a pimple, not a flower,
You're so puny and so small,
Look at me, see how I tower,
See how strong I am and tall!"

"Yes, of course, you're big and handsome,
More a shrub you are indeed.
I'm a poor thing in comparison,
But I'm useful, you're a weed!"



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A TOMTIT AND A WOODPECKER

"Pfuit, pfuit,
Pfuit, pfuit,
Find a worm and out with it!
Throw it down, throw it down,
Throw it down on the ground,
Give your friends a treat for once!"
"Not a chance."

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN AN OLD WILLOW AND THE RAIN

"Nine and ten 'that's nineteen,
Three more in the sun ..."

"Rain, what are you counting?
Are you doing sums?"
"Two—under that old fir,
Near the hayrick—six ..."
"Rain, what is it all for?
Are you in some fix?"

"I must count how many
Daisies there are there,
So when I start raining
Each will get its share.
Wouldn't it be awful
If I should run dry
Before the lot I've watered,
And leave some to die?"

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A BUTTERCUP AND A BEETLE

"Buttercup, why do you giggle?"
"Why, because of you, you tickle
With your waggling and your wiggling.
Can't help giggling when I'm tickled."

WHAT THE NUT BUSH SAID TO THE HARE

Stop, don't run there, Little Hare,
Quickly turn the other way,
For a Fox is lurking there,
Hardly mushrooming, I'd say.
If you take that narrow path,
You might lose your tail. Look out!

A LULLABY

Sleep, my baby Elk, sleep tight,
Close your pretty eyes, it's night.
Dream flowers growing by the stream
Have opened out, sweet be your dreams!
A father bear this way has passed
And left his prints upon the grass...
Sleepily the pines intone
The only tune they've ever known...
Shooting stars come flying down,
But they never reach the ground.
Hay has long been put in stacks,
And you're sprouting horns, young stag.
Peek-a-boo the moon is playing
With the clouds across it straying.
In this forest no one's killed,
It's a forest of good will.
When you get up in the morning
No one needs to give you warning,
Run about without a care
For there's not a trap or snare,
There's no lurking danger here.
Sleep, my precious, sleep, my dear.

* * *

Quiet-quiet. Not a murmur.
Flowers droop their heads...
Wearily the river mumbles
Where it turns a bend.
Suddenly an eagle-owl
Gives an eerie hoot...
Oh, the many different sounds
There are in the wood!
Louder at the break of dawn,
Muffled by the mist...
With our tape-recorder on,
None of them we'll miss.

A SEED

WHAT A JOLLY SOUP!

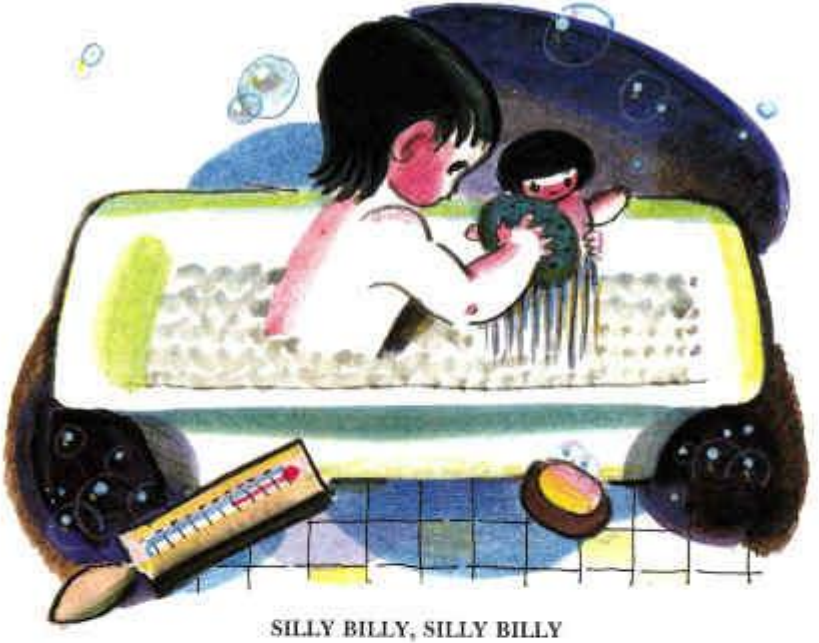
Here's of soup a plateful
With pretty ships afloat:
Parsley, diced potatoes,
A string bean like a float,
A tiny little onion head,
And bits of carrot, bright and red.
Open your mouth, now,
And keep it wide:
A ship's sailing in,
It can't wait outside!

A SEED

Hurry, hurry, Sun, come out,
We've a seed we want to plant,
Very quickly it will sprout,
To the east the stalk will slant,
Like the rainbow in the sky
It will make a bridge and I'll
Take my ducklings for a stroll
And on you, kind Sun, we'll call.

RAIN

Bragged the rain: "I shall chop up
All the puddles with my drops,
Sharp as swords they are!" They dropped
But they did not chop, they plopped,
And the whole thing was a flop.
Tired out, the rain gave up,
And stopped.



SILLY BILLY, SILLY BILLY

Come along now, little Billy,
Come and get a tubbing.
Really, Billy, don't be silly,
You do need a scrubbing!

Look who's here, it's Teddy Bear,
He's brought some water in a pail,
To wash in that because he's scared
To wet his precious stumpy tail!

LET'S GO TRAVELLING

We set off on our course
On our rocking horse.

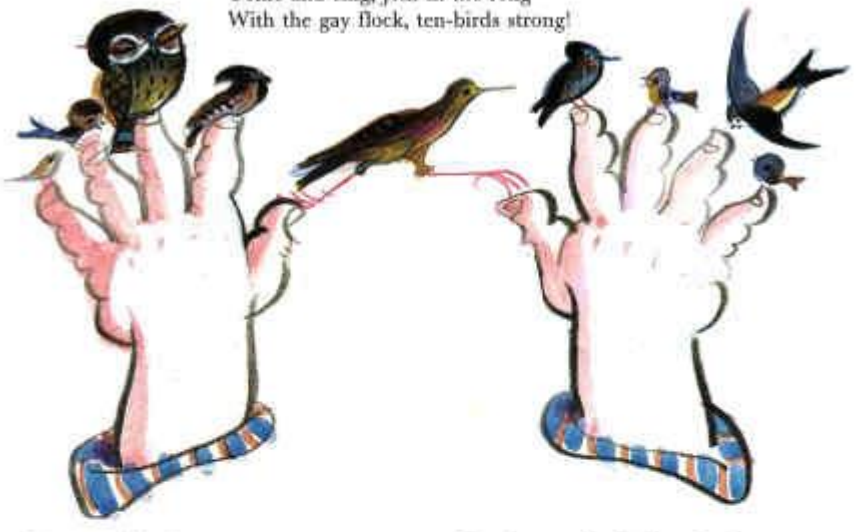
Then we changed to a car
And travelled quite far,
The river we reached
And stopped on the beach.

There we saw a boat—
A steamer, not a float.
We chugged along until
We came upon a hill.

The steamer dropped us there,
And we had to go by air.
The plane went zoo-oom,
And we're back in our room.

COME, JOIN IN SONG WITH THE BIRDS

Come and sing, join in the song
With the gay flock, ten-birds strong!



This small bird's a nightingale,
And that one is a landrail;
That's a sparrow, need I say,
And here's a siskin, chirp and gay;
That's a blackbird, and here's a starling,
Everybody loves the darling.

That's a martlet, that's a finch,
And here's an owl who at a pinch
Will go off to sleep at once,
Given half a chance.
Now, here comes an eagle-hawk.
Run for cover quick, don't gawk!

THE STORK

"Storky, dear, where is my home?
I won't find it all alone."

"Put your right foot down, and then
Put your left foot first, that's right,
Now your right foot once again,
Now your left, and hold on tight.
Put your right foot down, and then
Put your left foot first once more,
And you'll come to your own door!"

THE BEAR IN HIS LAIR

On the hill there's snow, snow,
At the foot there's snow, snow,
On the tree there's snow, snow,
On the ground there's snow, snow.
Under snow, in his lair,
Sleeps a bear.
You will rouse him, naughty hares,
If you don't take care.

PORRIDGE

Come along and do your stuff,
Don't you go into a huff,
Stop your grumbling, cooking pots,
Cook the porridge for our tots,
Make it very nice and sweet,
For a proper Sunday treat.

BUNNIES

Bunnies came running at the call,
And they sat down, one and all.
"Can we take the watering-can?"
They politely asked, and ran
Off to water all the rows
Where the lovely cabbage grows.

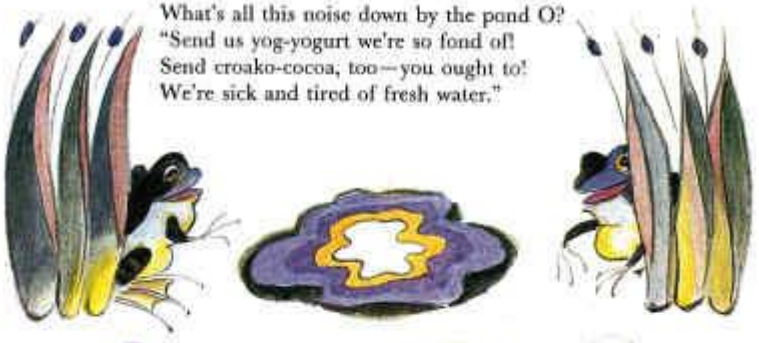
THE GNOME

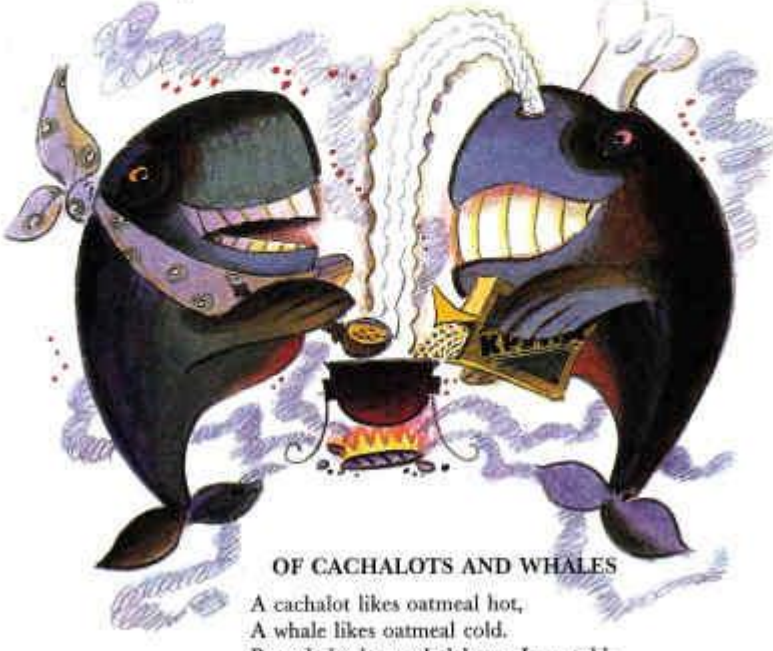
You know, a tiny little gnome
Comes every morning to our home
And squeaks, the moment he appears,
"Please children, wash behind the ears!"

We tell him what each toddler knows:
These days, there *aren't* any gnomes!
He only laughs and says, "Who cares!
You better wash behind the ears!"

FROGS

What's all this noise down by the pond O?
"Send us yog-yogurt we're so fond of!
Send croako-cocoa, too—you ought to!
We're sick and tired of fresh water."





OF CACHALOTS AND WHALES

A cachalot likes oatmeal hot,
A whale likes oatmeal cold.
But whales have whalebone, I am told,
And cachalots have teeth—So what?
Their teeth ache often—they cannot
Have oatmeal, hot or cold.

LULLABY GRASS

There's a dark wood far away
Where an Owl sleeps fast by day,
Overhead the Raven crows,
Where sweet lullaby grass grows.

Yes, sweet lullaby grass grows
That sweet lullaby words knows.
When it whispers magic words
Your eyes close, your head nods.

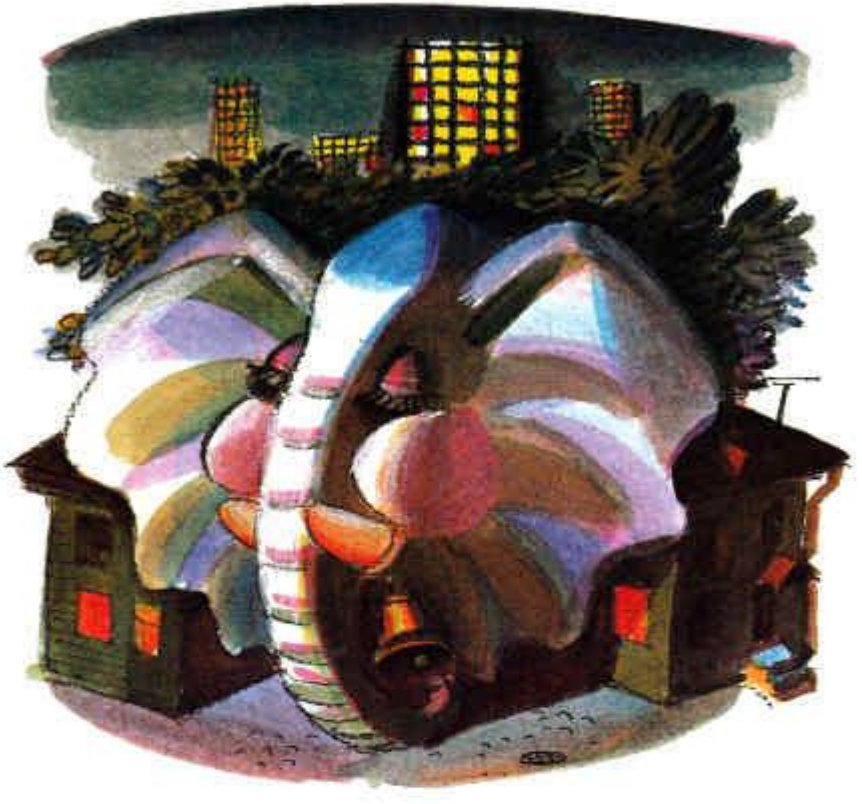
So tonight I'll ask the Owl
Not to hoot and not to howl—
Let the grass from Sleep-Fast Woods
Whisper to you magic words.

FOG

Somebody's stolen the wood in the night.
'T was there at sunset—now no wood in sight!

There's not a bush, not a stump in the ground—
Whiteness and emptiness stretch all around.

Where are the animals? Birds in the boughs?
Where shall we go now for mushrooms and flowers?



SLEEPY ELEPHANT

Jingle-bell-din, jingle-bell-don.
An Elephant walks up the street and down.
A grey old Elephant of Sleepy Town.
Now it has grown as dark as the night!
That grey old Elephant stands in my light.
Or—do I dream
That the light grows dim?
Jingle-bell-don.
Jingle-bell-din.

PLIM

A spoon is just a spoon,
A spoon is used for eating.
A cat's a cat, and soon
It will have little kittens.

A hat is just a hat
For going out and such.
A rag's a rag, and that
Isn't saying much.

And I have just invented
A funny wordlet: plim!
I made it and I sent it
Into the wide world: Plim!

It hops and leaps and bounds.
Plim, plim, plim
Means nothing but it sounds
Just right to me. Plim-plim!

WHERE THE LITTLE FISH SLEEPS

Night is dark, and water's deep.
Little Fish, where do you sleep?
Foxes' tracks lead to a hole;
Dogs', to kennels where they howl;
Squirrels', to a tree. Mouse tracks
Lead to tiny sort of cracks
In the floor. But in the river—
No Fish leaves a trace there, ever.
Night is dark, and water's deep.
Little Fish, where do you sleep?

OF CROCODILES

Don't slide down the banisters, please!
For as you glide down with such ease
A croc is awaiting downstairs
To catch foolish boys unawares.
The terrible-jawed crocodile
Each slider will drag by the heels
Deep down in the tropical Nile.
Don't slide down the banisters, please!

LEOPARDS AND RAPIDS

Help! Help! A silly young leopard
Is drowning in whirling lapids!
I mean, in whirring rapids
Is drowning a silly young reopard.
Help! Help! Hold on, dear helpard!
I mean, help on, dear lelpard!
Hold on, old Leop, hold tight!
I hope I will soon get it right.

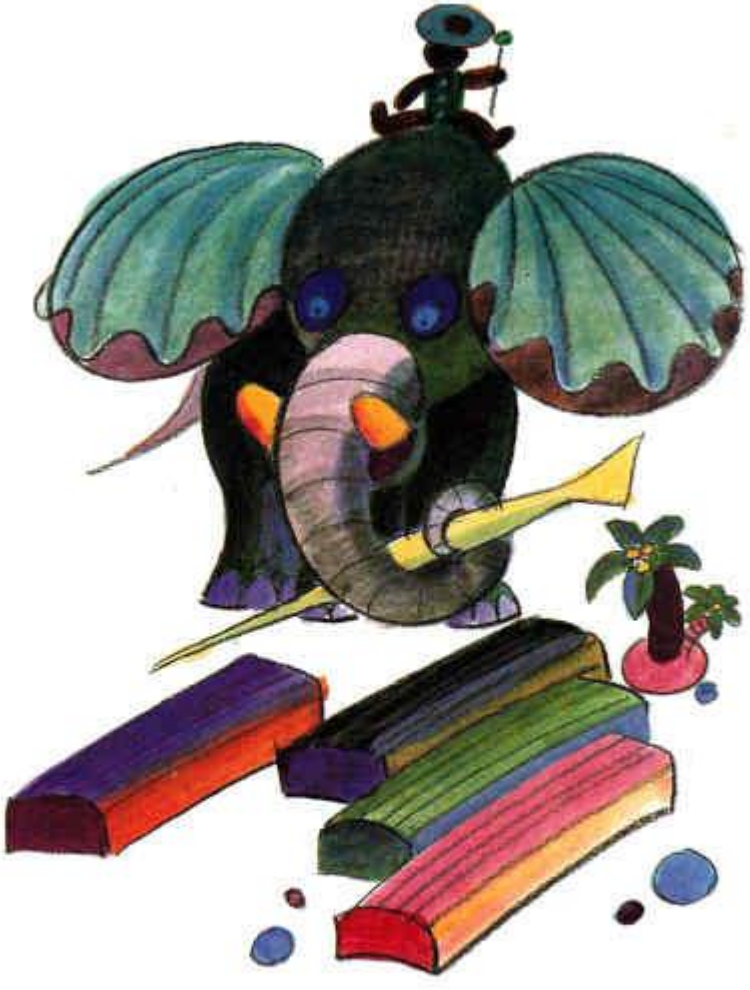
A MAGIC LAND

There is a country far away—
I haven't been there, but they say
That in the morning in that land
A Boot laps milk for breakfast, and
Potatoes, with delighted cries,
Peep through the window with black eyes.
And in the evening you can hear
A Bottle singing loud and clear,
Straining its long neck, while a chair
On bent legs hops and dances there.
There is a country far away—
I see you don't believe me. Why?

SAD AND MERRY

* * *

It is May Day,
It is May Day,
It's a holiday on May Day,
That's a big red light balloon,
That's my shirt, my red new shirt,
These are flags and flags and flags,
Those are balconies in red,
That's the holiday of May Day,
That's a big light red balloon,
That's my Mother,
That's my Daddy,
This is me,
And that's my song!



* * *

No one taught me to model in clay,
But here's an elephant I made today.
I called him Jumbo. Jumbo, hey!
Let us be friends. Come, let us play.

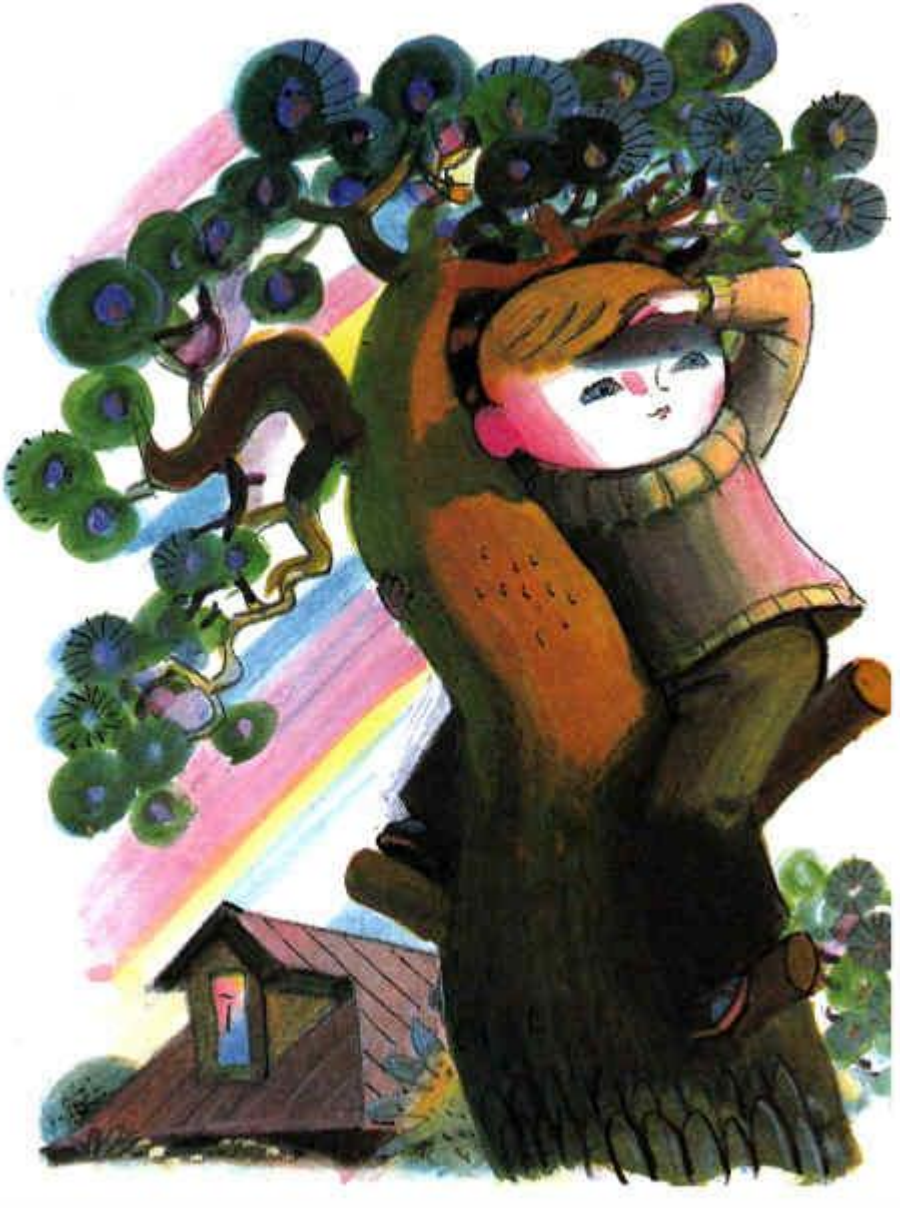
* * *

That pussy has no one at all,
No home, no nickname even.
It lives in a hole in a wall—
If you can call it living.
It's cold and all wet, poor cat,
Its paw is badly cut,
I'd take dear old Puss to our flat,
But Mummy says I can't.

* * *

I hate Jones, because he shot
Little Elk's Mother. I know,
He said so himself, I heard,
Though he spoke very low.

Who is going to feed
Li'll Elk? His Mother is dead!
I hate Jones—I do indeed.
Let him go home, I said!

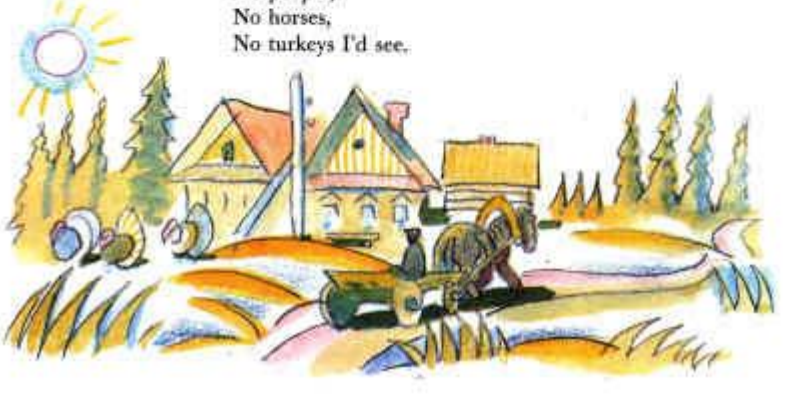


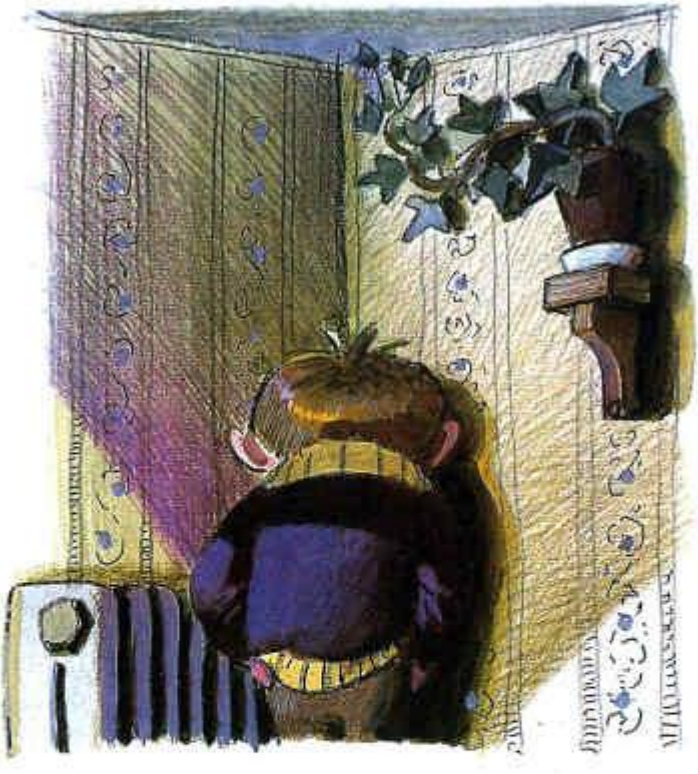
* * *

In early morning I climb up a tree
And see far away a blue countree,
Blue people,
Blue horses,
And turkeys blue.

Late in the evening I climb up a tree
And see far away a golden countree,
People of gold,
Horses of gold,
Turkeys of gold, too.

If in the night I climbed up a tree,
I'd see one big No-Nothing Countree,
No people,
No horses,
No turkeys I'd see.

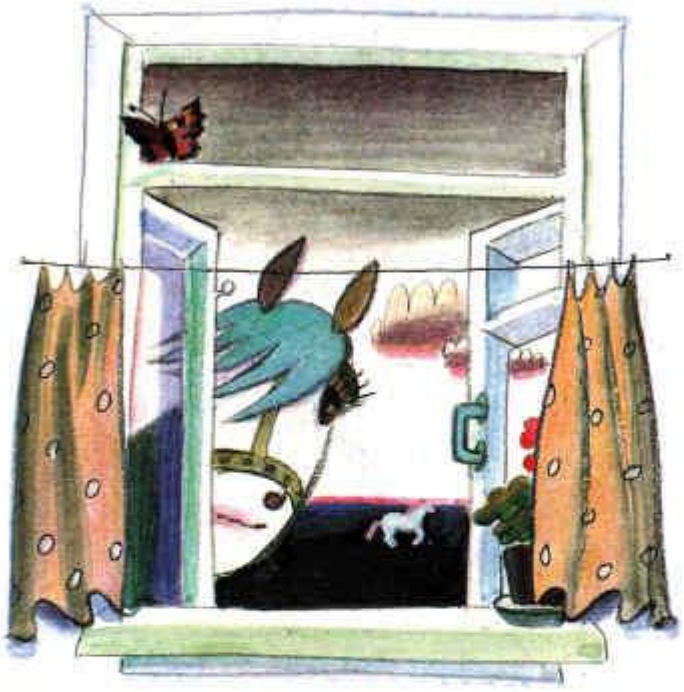




* * *

So I'll stand in the corner. Forever.
For a day. For a week. I never
Took no cuff-link, I tell you true.
Silly cuff-link. Red cuff-link. Or blue.

I'll stand in the corner forever.
For a month. For a year. Why ever
Do you say that I took your blue
Stupid cuff-link? When it's not true!



* * *

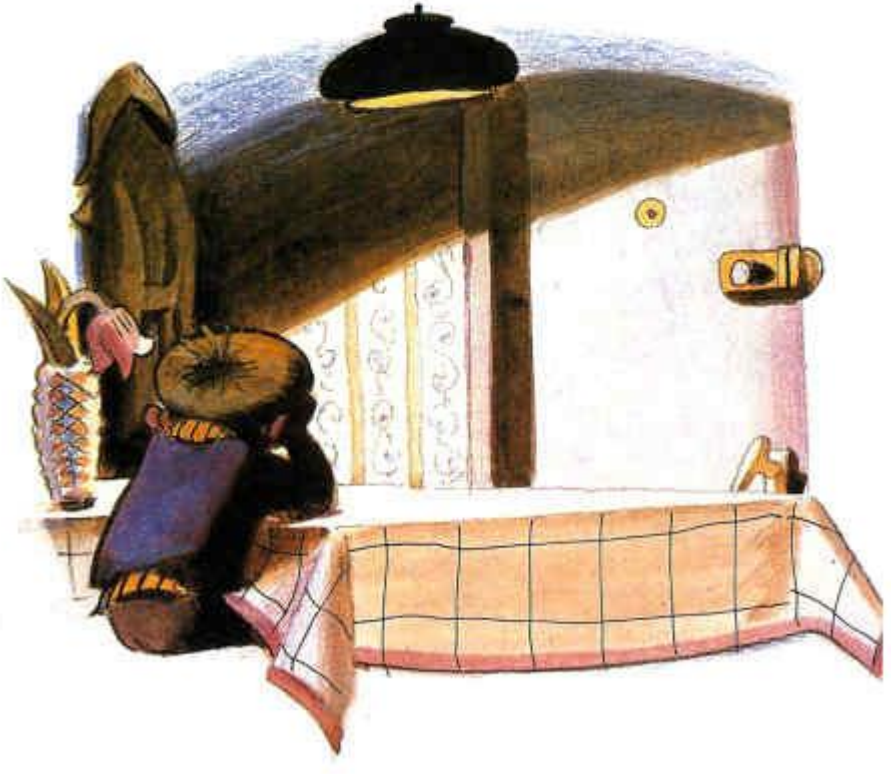
I lie in bed. I'm ill and sad.
Here's my new boat.
But I'm not glad.
And in the country
Horses run
free.
My Daddy bought me such a tall
And powerful crane, a car, a ball.
But in the country
Horses run
free.
Here is a 'copter.
It's not bad.

But I lie ill
And I feel sad.
And in the country
Horses run
free.
I was in the country
In summer, I was.
And gave some bread
To a big grey horse.
He chewed the bread
And shook his head.
See?

* * *

Friday goes on without end.
I wait. I do not play.
"On Friday," said my friend,
"I'm coming without fail."

It's getting late. Soon now
Mother will say, "Beddy-bye."
But he's a grown-up! How
Could he have told a lie?



* * *

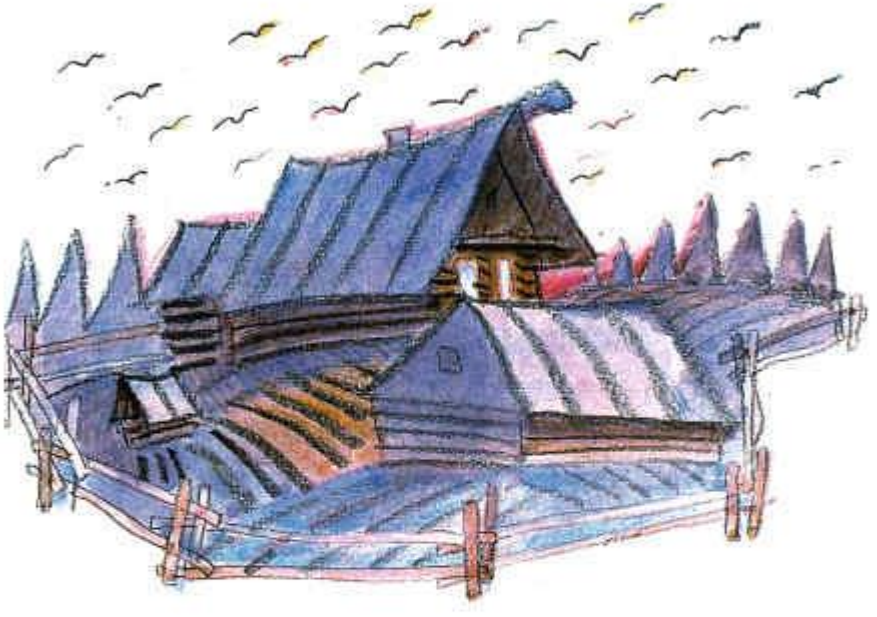
I have a lizard in a box.
It has a nest of warm old socks.
I give it tasty things to eat.
And I am awf'ly fond of it.

* * *

The night is warm
and the wind is warm.
Warm is the sky
and a piece of rye-
bread, *and* fresh milk, too.
"Mummy, warm night to you!"

COCK-A-
DOODLE-
DOO
tales

COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO



Cockerel wanted to make up a verse;
He thought he could surely do much worse
Than taking his own cock-a-doodle-doo
And adding another line or two.
But his Cock-a-doodle was not to be found,
It just wasn't anywhere around,
Neither the "cock" nor the "doodle"...

ock-a-doodle-doo

Pig was lolling in a puddle.
He said to her: "I wanted to make up a verse,
I thought I could surely do much worse
Than taking my own cock-a-doodle-doo
And adding another line or two.
But my cock-a-doodle is not to be found.
Have you seen it anywhere around?"
Pig shook her head.
"No, I haven't seen it," she said.
"But I can give you
My oink-oink instead."

"Thank you," said Cockerel.
"You are very kind,
But I want my own cock-a-doodle to find."

oink-oink

So Cockerel packed a bundle
And got on his way
To search for the cock-a-doodle
He had mislaid.

Outside the yard he met Pussy-Cat
Stepping noiselessly on her soft pads.
He said, "Pussy, I wanted to make up a verse,
I thought I could surely do much worse
Than taking my own cock-a-doodle-doo
And adding another line or two,
But my cock-a-doodle is not to be found.
Have you seen it anywhere around?"

Puss shook her head.
"No, I haven't seen it," she said.
"But wouldn't you like
My miaow-miaow instead?"
"Thank you," said Cockerel,
"You are very kind,
But I want my own cock-a-doodle to find."

Cockerel sighed,
Pulled his belt tight,
And plodded on
Till he reached the pond.
There he saw Frog hopping along
Trilling his froggy song.
He said, "Frog, I wanted to make up a verse.
I thought I could surely do much worse
Than taking my own cock-a-doodle-doo
And adding another line or two,
But my cock-a-doodle is not to be found.
Have you seen it anywhere around?"

Frog shook his head.
"No, I haven't seen it," he said,
"But there's my croak-croak,
Won't it do instead?"

"Thank you," said Cockerel,
"You are very kind,
But I want my own cock-a-doodle to find."

He cut himself a traveller's staff
Before setting out on his hazardous path,
Then took a look at the setting sun:
Walking at night wasn't much fun.
At home his wife Hen had cooked supper,
At home his chickens were asking for Papa.
"Husband!" Hen cried,
"I'm terribly tired,
I've been looking for your cock-a-doodle-doo,
Although I have better things to do!
Our mischievous chicks made away with it,
And messed about all day with it,
Learning to crow, they said,
As beautiful as their Dad.
Here it is, it's all there, I think.
See that you take better care of it."

So Cockerel went and made up his verse,
And he certainly could have done much worse
Than taking his own cock-a-doodle-doo
And adding one more cock-a-doodle-doo
And yet a third cock-a-doodle-doo.

THE TALE OF LITTLE CARP

* * *

There lived in a nice little brook
Little Carp in a nice little nook.
Where cool shades always sway to and fro
And tall rushes and golden grass grow.
In the morning, the green sun would rise,
Never scorching, but cool and so nice.
And its green kindly eye would soon peep
Through the waves in the brook's deepest deep.
Water Spider would nimbly glide down
A transparent, invisible thread.
Snails would crawl without making a sound,
Crayfish walk backwards—never ahead.
Little Carp found in clean muddy spots
Lots of daintiest food of all sorts:
Little wormsies and big hulking worms,
Tiny grubs, too delicious for words.
So Li'll Carp lived in this cosy nook,
And he loved to make trips down the brook
To a grove of high straight shaggy reed,
To a glade overgrown with duckweed,
Where white lilies bloomed, rush rustled, and
A blue paddle was stuck in the sand.

* * *

Little Carp swam one day somewhere, slow.
Where he swam, he would certainly know.
It was quiet in the brook's deepest deep,
Where the sun's kindly eye did oft peep.
And the sun looked so green from below—
Little Carp's little heart felt aglow.
Only—Who is this diving so fast?
What grey shadow is this, slinking past?
It's the big Leaping Frog! It comes near
And it whispers in Little Carp's ear:
"Now, this life in the stream. Think it's good?
Is this drink, I ask you? Is this food?
Ah, if only the lands you had seen—
Fairylands where no carp has yet been!
Gnats and midges in myriads swarm there,
Fat mosquitoes in clouds fill the air.
You can eat all you want in a trice.
Gentle rains are so warm and so nice—
All day long you can loiter around
In the grass softer than eiderdown.
What delight, Carp! If only you knew—
Yes, old fellow, there's real life for you."

Little Carp felt so bored with the brook,
So disgusted with his cosy nook,
That he thought, "What do I wait here for?
Living here is indeed such a bore!"
So he followed the big Leaping Frog,
Brazen, white-bellied, goggle-eyed brag.
On his way, though, he met Little Perch
Who asked him in surprise and reproach:
"Don't you know fishes live in the water
And they cannot live where they ought not to?"
Little Carp never stopped. With a flip
Of his fin, he continued his trip.

* * *

There's the bank. Overgrown with grass
Stretched the land, unbelievably vast.
Little Carp could but gape at the land.
Ah, how splendid it was! And how grand!
Green with rushes and sedge, and the sky
Was so blue, and impossibly high.
Gnats and midges in myriads swarmed there,
Fat mosquitoes in clouds filled the air,
And the colourful huge butterflies
Were a feast—and not just for the eyes!

* * *

Soon the Frog hopped away with loud croaks,
Very likely to see other Frogs.
Little Carp, with a rush and a bound
Also scrambled on hot sandy ground.
Ouch! The sun was a fiery scorcher,
Scalding, parching—a terrible torture.
There was neither shade nor wind; the sedge
Cut his belly, sharp as razor's edge.
Little Carp in his pain and his fear,
Clean forgot dreams of feasting, poor dear.

* * *

Then to toss and to thrash he began,
Crying, "I must return—if I can—
To the grove of high straight shaggy reed,
To the glade overgrown with duckweed,
Where white lilies bloom, rushes rustle, and
A blue paddle is stuck in the sand."
He was more than half dead when he got to
The stream, and splashed back into water.
And at once he felt fresh, he felt cool
In the lovely, familiar old pool.

Now the old green sun sails overhead,
Never scorchingly hot, never red.
Golden blades in the greenish light sway,
Happy Little Carp plays there all day.

THREE KITTENS

There lived three brother kittens,
Tom, Timothy and Ted.
They had a kind old mistress
Whose name was Granny Peg.

She gave them cups of cocoa
With scones and marmalade,
And bought them toys for birthdays
And bottles of orangeade.

To find the mislaid glasses
They helped her with a will,
And in the kitchen garden
They watered beets and dill.

She gave them shopping baskets
And sent for groceries.
Instead of eggs and butter
They bought three bags of sweets.

The kitchen floor they polished
With wax until it shone.
"What fun!" they cried. "The kitchen
Is like a frozen pond!"

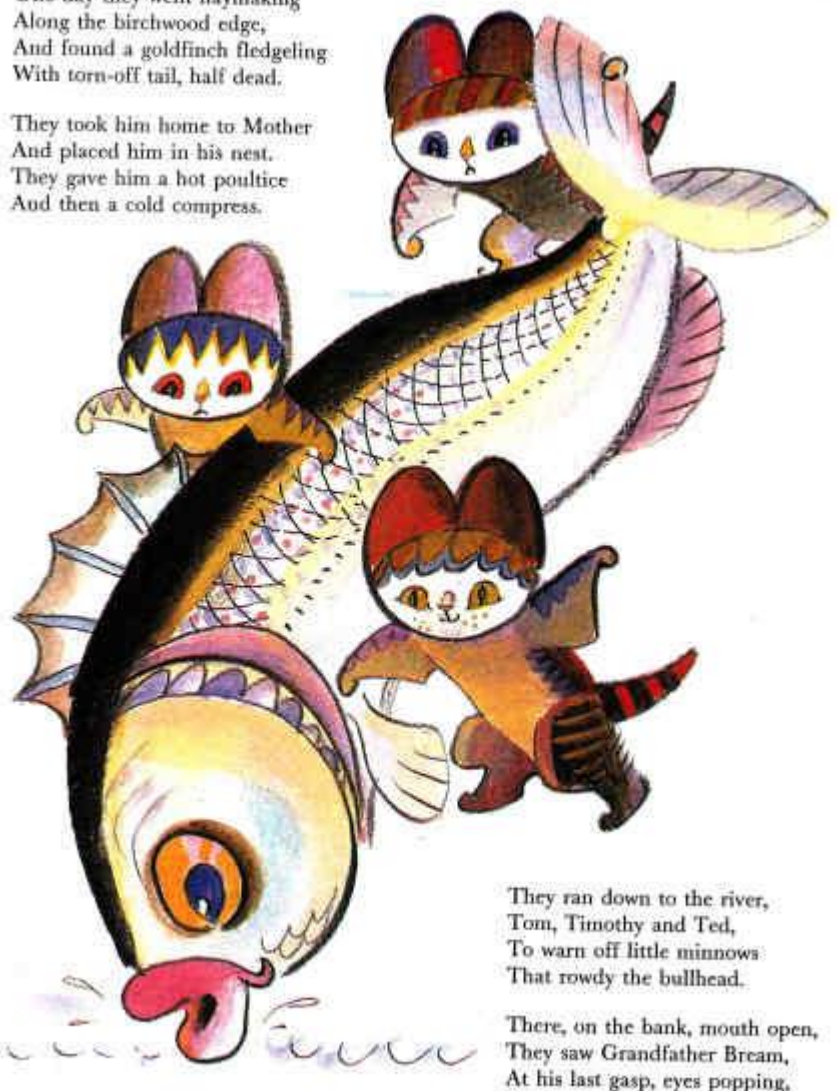
They had a fine time skating
About the kitchen floor.
Their mistress nearly fainted
On opening the door.

To get some beets and carrots
Tom, Timothy and Ted
Went to the kitchen garden
And there a mole they met.

They spent the whole day playing
The game of blind man's buff
With Mole, his wife and children:
Gran Peg was in a huff.

One day they went haymaking
Along the birchwood edge,
And found a goldfinch fledgeling
With torn-off tail, half dead.

They took him home to Mother
And placed him in his nest.
They gave him a hot poultice
And then a cold compress.



They ran down to the river,
Tom, Timothy and Ted,
To warn off little minnows
That rowdy the bullhead.

There, on the bank, mouth open,
They saw Grandfather Bream,
At his last gasp, eyes popping,
Unable to reach the stream.

They lifted him and—Heave ho!
Sent flying in the pool,
With gleeful admonition:
"Mind you don't drown, old fool!"

"I'll buy an ABC book,"
Gran Peg decided once,
"For an illiterate kitten
Is just a common dunce."

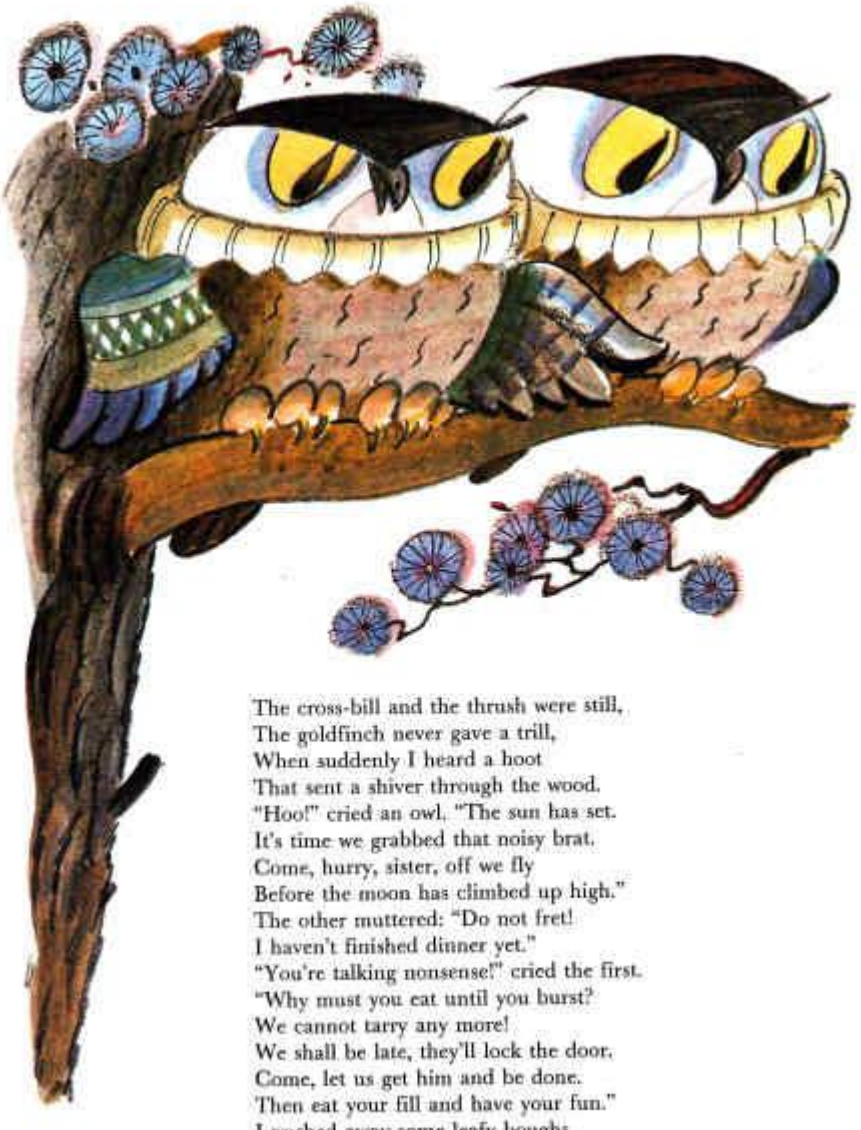
That very evening, gladly,
Tom, Timothy and Ted
Sat round the table to study
And learned the alphabet.

They took a sheet of paper
And printed in a trice
In red, green and blue crayons
This warning to the mice:

"Hey, mice, you stop that scraping!
We're watching every hole!
Get out of loft and cellar
While your grey coats are whole!"
And then they signed their letter:
"TOM, TIMOTHY and TED".

A NIGHT-TIME STORY

I roamed the forest all day long,
And suddenly the day was gone.
The sun had vanished from the sky—
Just left a crimson trace behind.
The firs were drowsy on their feet,
The mighty oak was fast asleep,
The hazel bush had drowned in shade,
And all was silent in the glade.



The cross-bill and the thrush were still,
The goldfinch never gave a trill,
When suddenly I heard a hoot
That sent a shiver through the wood.
"Hoo!" cried an owl. "The sun has set.
It's time we grabbed that noisy brat.
Come, hurry, sister, off we fly
Before the moon has climbed up high."
The other muttered: "Do not fret!
I haven't finished dinner yet."
"You're talking nonsense!" cried the first.
"Why must you eat until you burst?
We cannot tarry any more!
We shall be late, they'll lock the door.
Come, let us get him and be done.
Then eat your fill and have your fun."
I pushed away some leafy boughs
And shouted, "Who're you grabbing, owls?"

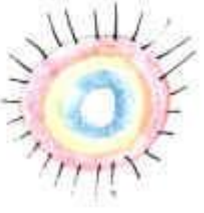
One owl, after it cleaned its beak,
Unhurriedly began to speak:
"There is a funny little chap,
No trouble while the sun is up,
He's deft with spoon, and knife, and fork,
Can draw a cruiser, fears no dog,
But when he hears, 'It's time for bed,'
He hollers fit to raise the dead:
'Do not send
Me to bed!
It is too
Early yet!
Don't you put
Out the light,
I won't sleep
Through the night!
No, I won't
Stop these howls,
Off I'll run
To the owls!'

"We've thought the matter over. Right,
That funny boy won't sleep at night,
And won't accept the ways of men—
He ought to be an owlet then.
We'll bring him to our hollow tree,
And make him chew a magic pea,
Intone five fearsome changeling words,
And he will always live with birds."

So saying, off the two owls flew
And vanished in the evening gloom.
By God! I knew the little chap
Those nasty owls had gone to grab!
His name was Gene, a five-year-old,
By day he was as good as gold,
But every night from ten to four
He raised a terrible uproar:
"Do not send
Me to bed!
It is too
Early yet!
Don't you put
Out the light,
I won't sleep
Through the night!
No, I won't
Stop these howls,
Off I'll run
To the owls!"
What shall I do? I must warn Gene
That two grim owls were after him!
I have to run to help him, but
How shall I find the shortest cut
When dusk has fallen, fog has settled
And stars are shining overhead?

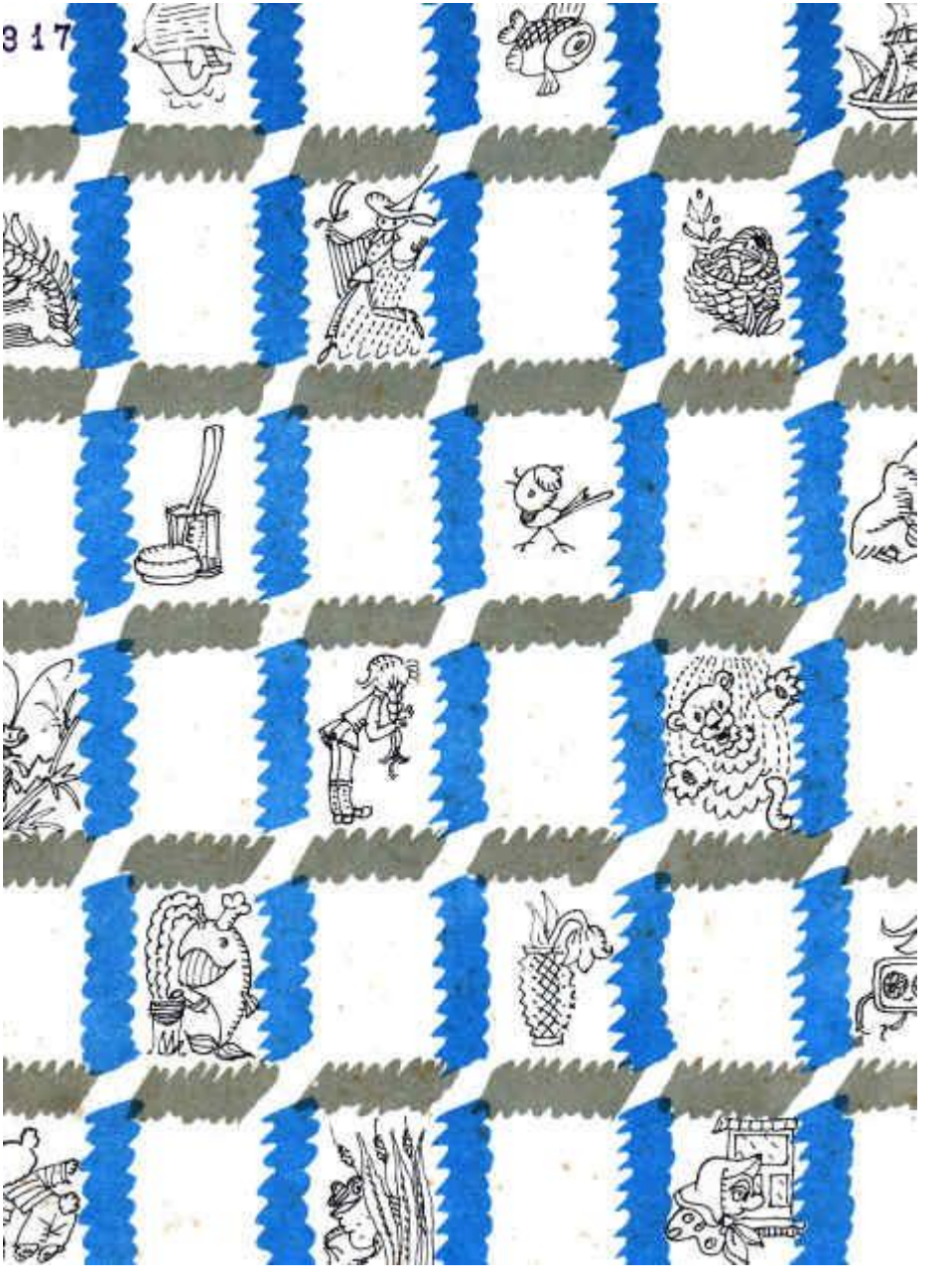
Wait, there's Woodpecker, pal of mine,
I know he sleeps in that tall pine.
"Wake up!" I cried. "My friend's in trouble!
I need to get home at the double.
But how am I to find my way?"
Woodpecker shook his head, dismayed:
"I'm stumped, I think we'd better rouse
My nimble-witted neighbour Mouse."
So Mouse came running: she *was* smart,
She squeaked encouragement: "Take heart!
Old Mole, my cousin, underground
Has dug a passage, safe and sound.
Just follow it, it's short and straight,
And you will never lose your way."

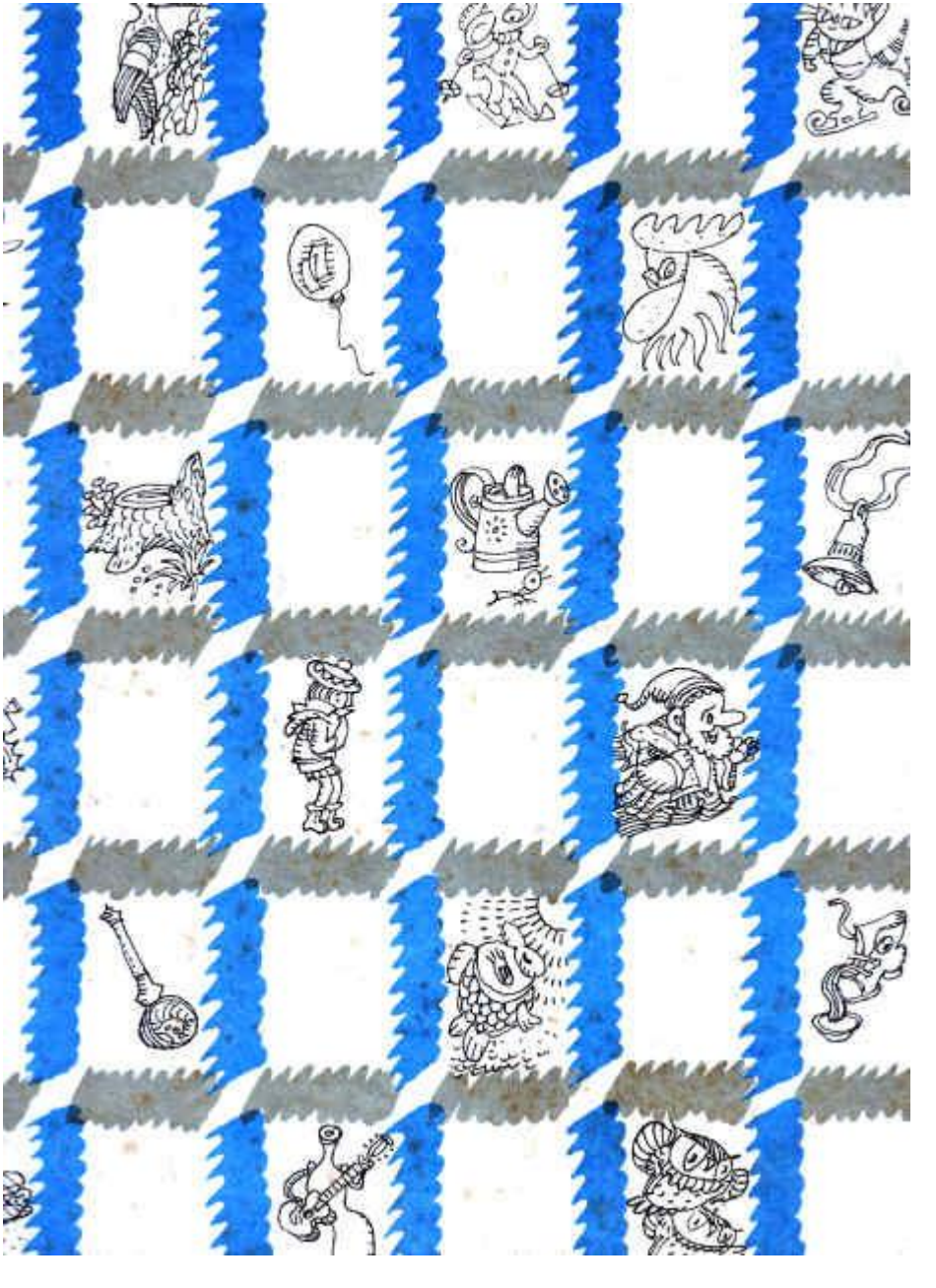
In pitch-black darkness out I struck
To Mole-house—I was out of luck:
The tunnel's entrance was a hole
Just wide enough to fit a mole.
"No short-cut road for me, it seems,
I'll have to find some other means
Of getting fast out of the wood,
I'd make my way as best I could,
But there's no path to right or left ..."
Woodpecker, though, came to my help.
"Hey, firebugs!" called he, and they came,
Each bug a little pulsing flame.
The darkness fell back and was not,
And off I sprinted like a shot,
Fast as an Arab thoroughbred,
Fast as a supersonic jet.
I got home soon, before the owls,
And there I heard Gene's night-time howls:



"Do not send
Me to bed!
It is too
Early yet!
Don't you put
Out the light,
I won't sleep
Through the night!
No, I won't
Stop these howls,
Off I'll run
To the owls!"

I shouted: "Danger! Stop this din!
Two owls are out to grab you, Gene!
They're sick and tired of your wails,
They'll make an owl of you, they say!"
On hearing this Gene shut his mouth,
And not a sound disturbed the house.
The scare was good for Gene: he's changed
And never since tried raising Cain
At bedtime. He just says, "Good night"
And falls asleep till morning bright.
But owls, mind you, don't care for noise
And nightly hunt bad-tempered boys.





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